

South Mississippi Regional Center

SOUNDINGS

Leroy Acker: A Story of Friendship

By John Lipscomb, Retired Residential Services Director



Leroy Acker is my friend. In my case, I didn't recognize it right away. It actually occurred to me after knowing him for several years. He moved to SMRC in 1979 after spending many years at other programs in the state. Leroy told me that I was his friend, but I kinda let that go in one ear and out the other. But Leroy has a way of wearing you down, in a good way. He kept telling me that I was his friend and after years hearing this, it just dawned on me that what Leroy had been telling me all along was true. We are friends! He would say, "Hey buddy, c'mon over here and shake my hand." He came over to my office for coffee, to talk about birthdays, to discuss where we were going to eat, to tell me how tall he was, ask about my family, to tell me about music, guitars, radio batteries and of course, "the ladies." So, yes, it took "silly ol' me" years to realize that we were friends and Leroy had figured it out in a matter of days. He knew immediately that friends were the people you talked to, drank coffee with, ate lunch with and basically could just count on.

As the years slowly went by, our routines became more established. Leroy would stop by to visit, inform me of some im-

portant "news flash" and of course, come for coffee appointments. It was usually during the coffee appointments that we discussed important issues, made plans for going to a restaurant and most importantly, dole out "new radio batteries." With his love of music, he wore them quickly listening to his radio all the time. We tried every kind of battery that was known to man, but he drained them all dry. I tried to get him to plug the radios into the electrical outlets to save the batteries, but to no avail. We even tried rechargeable batteries and that was a major fiasco. He once got a co-worker to place regular batteries into the battery charger and melted the charger to the core. "Geez, Louise, that could have been bad!"

I would be remiss to not tell you about a trip to Tulane Hospital via old Highway 90 through the marsh. We always played the radio loud and sang along or just made up words when we drove to New Orleans. So, one day, here we are "rocking" to the Georgia Satellites, "Keep Your Hands to Yourself." We didn't know any of the words except, "Don't hand me no lines and keep your hands to yourself." I don't even know if we knew those words, but we were rocking. Yeah, I was keeping my eyes on the road. Anyway, Leroy started telling me about alligators and says that he grew up here. So, I say, "Really, show me the way." Well, he started telling me to turn left here and then take a right and another right and all of a sudden we were in front of the home he grew up in. I was a little uneasy, but sure enough, Leroy's mom walked out on the porch and invited us in for a visit. So, we had coffee and an unannounced visit with Leroy's mom. She was delighted! Funny, how some things are just meant to happen.

I could bore you stiff with Leroy stories.....how much he could eat, how nearly everybody in every restaurant we ate in, and we ate in a lot, became a member of his fan club.

Continued on page 6

Mississippi Department of Mental Health and the South Mississippi Regional Center recruit, employ and promote qualified employees and applicants without regard to race, religion, color, sex, age, natural origin or disability.

The Mississippi Department of Mental Health/Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 which provides a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

Soundings is the recorder of SMRC's progress in meeting the comprehensive needs of citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities who reside in the six southernmost counties of Mississippi.

South Mississippi Regional Center
1170 West Railroad Street
Long Beach, Mississippi 39560-4199
phn: 228-688-2923 fax: 228-865-9364
www.smrc.state.ms.gov

Lori V. Brown, M.S., NHA
SMRC Director

Editorial Board

Jennifer Bond
Mamie Carlson
Denise Christmas-Wallace
Ada Jones
Glenda McMillon

SMRC MISSION

South Mississippi Regional Center supports Mississippians with intellectual and developmental disabilities, using a person-centered approach, by promoting active partnerships to enhance each person's quality of life and independence through choices of living, working and learning.

SMRC CORE VALUES

Commitment
Respect
Responsibility
Communication
Cooperative Effort
Continuous Learning

2019 Edition

From The Corner Office

Lori V. Brown, MS, NHA, Program Director



The year 2018 was busy for SMRC programs. Our Family and Friends Association hosted Robert Landrum, the Chairman of the Board of Mental Health, at their January meeting. This was a wonderful opportunity for the membership to speak one-on-one with Mr. Landrum about mental health issues which have the potential to impact services. In March every city in our service area recognized ID/DD Awareness month by signing and presenting proclamations at City Hall. The St. Stanislaus College graduating class of 2018 partnered with SMRC to host a "Rock the Night Away" red carpet event which turned out to be a fun-filled night of entertainment in April. In May SMRC had the honor of hosting the state Board of Mental Health meeting which was attended by mental health service providers from our region, in addition to Department of Mental Health leadership. SMRC celebrated 40 years of service in June hosting a festival in Long Beach. An agency merger with Ellisville State School took place on July 1st in an effort to continue streamlining costs. SMRC became a finalist in the Mississippi's Healthiest Workplace program in July. In August we named our Employee of the Year, Michael White, and recognized numerous employees for service tenure. Among those recognized was Deneece Saucier who has been a faithful and dedicated employee for over 35 years. We braced for a Tropical Storm in September and were thankful the storm made landfall east of our coastal locations. In October we spent time giving back to the community through our efforts to raise awareness and funding for the American Cancer Society. The campaign ended with a Pink Parade in Long Beach and a total of \$2,500 raised by employees. As the year came to a close, we were thankful for another year to reflect on all that we've accomplished. The highlight of our December Family and Friends Association Christmas program was the play "The Legend of Christmas Coyote" written and narrated by Jimmy Tucker of our Training Resources Department and presented by some very talented people. This annual event puts a smile on faces and marks the closing of one year in preparation for the next. You will read about many of these events within this newsletter. I believe the year 2019 will be just as eventful as the past and look forward to the challenges that wait.

SMRC WELLNESS COUNCIL Denise Christmas-Wallace

The Wellness Council was formed in September 2010 in response to State Legislation establishing Employee Wellness Programs for state agencies in Mississippi. The goal is to enhance workforce health and productivity and contribute to employer financial health. The Council highlights several health topics annually including National Nutrition Month, National Safety Month, and National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The Council has sponsored walking contests, preventive screenings, informative sessions, and health fairs for employees to encourage a healthy and active lifestyle. South Mississippi Regional Center earned the Mississippi Recognized Healthy Employer distinction as part of the State Employee Wellness Program. Along with this honor, SMRC was named a finalist for the 2018 Healthiest Workplaces in Mississippi in the Public Sector during the July 26 luncheon at the Old Capitol Inn in downtown Jackson. This event was hosted by Mississippi Business Journal, Mississippi Department of Health and the Mississippi Business Group on Health.

Page 2



40 Years of Service

Lori Brown, Program Director

SMRC enthusiastically celebrated 40 years of service in 2018. The milestone anniversary was marked by a festival on June 1st in Long Beach where hundreds of people visited our campus for a fun-filled day of entertainment and reminiscing. This very special event took months of careful planning. The Purchner Pavilion area served as the center of the festival activities with the streets and parking areas converted into a street style festival with booths set up for games and prizes. Entertainers provided music throughout the day and our guests enjoyed a meal provided in partnership with Ron Savell of Mugshots Restaurant and employees of Southeast Commercial Real Estate. SMRC received a very generous donation from Kirk and Bach Kimball of Boogie Magee's Smoke House BBQ, as well as donations from many of our other partners to host the event. Over 40 community volunteers were on hand to provide assistance. There were numerous highlights from the day, too many to count. The most rewarding aspect was seeing and visiting with familiar faces from the past.

Telling SMRC's story provides an opportunity for reflection and ensures the history of the program is carried into the future. The legislation which established SMRC and defined the six-county service area was enacted in 1974. Construction on the physical facilities began in 1978 and the first cottage opened that year. By 1982, four cottages in Long Beach served 96 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities within a residential setting. Many of the first residents moved to Long Beach from Ellisville State School to be closer to their families in the coastal region. Community services were added in the mid 1980's and the Pearl River Infant Project, later called Project



PRINTS, was one of the first early intervention programs in the state. In 1992, SMRC opened the first 10-bed ICF/IID licensed community program in the state in Biloxi. Home and Community-Based Services through the ID/DD Waiver were offered in the late 1990's.

SMRC reached its full residential capacity in 2000 with the ability to serve 260 people in residential settings. In subsequent years, the need for more community-based options became evident with a growing list of people waiting to receive ID/DD Waiver services. Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and coupled with funding cuts, SMRC began downsizing operations with the closing of the early intervention program and downsizing community services. The trend in downsizing continues today as SMRC strives to meet a growing demand for community expansion.

Through the years the employees of SMRC have had a direct positive impact on the services provided to people in the six-county service area. The first 30 years were years of tremendous growth. The last ten years have seen great evolution in our service delivery system, moving toward services in a community-based setting. As our residential service capacity is reduced, the community services capacity should continue to grow. These are all necessary changes to ensure a strong system of care to meet the future needs of our intellectual and developmental disabilities community. I feel confident that South Mississippi Regional Center, through the direction of the Department of Mental Health leadership, will be poised to meet the service needs for the coming 40 years.



PARTNERSHIPS

INVESTMENT **LABOR** **VALUES** **Understanding** **Service**
 Creating Opportunities *Caring*
Giving Inspiration Consensus
 Trust Commitment
 Purpose
 Learning
VISION *Sharing* **SUCCESS**
 Respect Leadership
 Common goals



Goodwill Industries



Gulfport Job Corps Center



ARC of Pearl River County



Feeding the Gulf Coast



Gulfport Leisure Services



American Red Cross Blood Drive



BXS Insurance



Pass Christian Breakfast with
the State Legislators



Anna Shurley Bible Study



St. Stanislaus College



Delta Sigma Theta
Sorority Inc.



First United Methodist Church of
Long Beach Puppet Ministry



Jerry Peralta



First Baptist Church of
Long Beach

A Story of Friendship - continued from page 1

How I had to make sure that he was receiving decaffeinated coffee. I only made that mistake one time! That he is not fooling when he says he has to go to the bathroom. That driving up and down Hwy. 90 in the spring and summer was a favorite pastime, how he could make me feel better no matter how down or upset I was, etc.

In the late 90s, Leroy moved from the main SMRC campus to a community home in Wiggins. The home was designed for an older population and Leroy knew a lot of the people who lived there. You might think that distance would "put the kibosh" on our relationship, but that was not happening. Leroy and I talked on the phone and had regular lunch dates. Sometimes, I would go up to eat in Wiggins. We often brought along friends. But more often someone would bring him to the Coast where he could eat shrimp, fish and oysters only to be topped off with a large piece of pie or cake. This relationship has lasted for the past 20 years. Usually, the phone would ring and I would hear Leroy say in a deep sing-song voice "John, I've got a birthday coming up ol' buddy." It really wouldn't matter that it was November and his birthday was in May. He just had a birthday coming up. So I would respond, "well, we don't have to wait until your birthday to go to lunch." So that's how we kept in touch over the years and kept the friendship rolling. Lunches, birthdays and Christmases were all celebrated with the same enthusiasm. Leroy was even a "guest of honor" at my retirement from state service in 2010, and re-

tirement has not stopped us from checking on each other. We still go to lunch and visit during the holidays.

And now, the best news is my friend has moved to an IDD Waiver supervised living home in Hattiesburg, MS. So, of course, we had to go out to eat before his "going away" party. One last funny little story: We ate at a local place in Wiggins where Leroy ordered catfish. He had the waitress hooked by the end of the meal. She asked whether he would like dessert and he promptly ordered pecan pie. She said, "We don't have pecan pie" and told him she had chocolate pie and red velvet cake. He said he would have pecan pie. I then explained to him our options. He said, "oh ok, I'll have pecan pie." We settled for chocolate....ha, but that is the same resiliency that he used on me when he decided we were friends.

So now Leroy resides in Hattiesburg where, for the first time in his life, he has his own bedroom with a queen-size bed. I have only talked to my friend on the phone, but he sounds happy and is glad to live in a quiet place. He says he likes the three other men who reside there and the staff is his family now. Leroy is happy in his new setting. This makes me happy. It also brings satisfaction to know that in helping others, we actually help ourselves. Leroy knew this from the beginning when he helped me understand that we were friends. I am eternally grateful that he did.

Family & Friends Association



The SMRC Family and Friends Association is open to any adult already networking with SMRC in programs at Long Beach or in any of its community sites or who is interested

in the services and activities of South Mississippi Regional Center. Family members—immediate and extended, guardians, professionals and community persons are invited to join the association. Annual dues are \$5.00.

2019 Meeting Dates:

January 20 March 17 May 2019 (date tba)
September 15 November 17 December 2019

For additional information call: Ms. Pamela Emrick, President
- 601.268.3490 or office of the Director, 228-867-1302.

Biloxi Community Homes Director



Brian Daniels was selected as the Director for the Biloxi Community Homes in October 2018. Brian has a bachelor's degree in sociology from Jackson State University and a master's degree in Human Behavior from Capella University. He has served as the Qualified

Intellectual Disabilities Professional for the Biloxi program since August of 2016. Brian has prior mental health work experience having previously worked at Singing River Services and Specialized Treatment Facility.

Employee Highlights



2018 Employee of the Year

Michael White was selected as SMRC's 2018 Employee of the Year. Michael began his career in Long Beach in 1994 and later transferred to the Wiggins Community Home program in 1996. Michael has a quiet demeanor and cheerfully gets the job done regardless of the task. He is known for his compassion and caring spirit and is well respected among his peers and the people entrusted to his care. Michael's supervisor, Fannie Williams says, "Michael will not hesitate to assist at the group home or main campus when asked. He does so with a smile on his face and never complains. You could not ask for a better team player." Michael exemplifies the true meaning of SMRC's Core Value of commitment in his daily work. Congratulations!



35 Years of Service

Denece "Dee" Saucier was honored on August 10, 2018 for her 35 years of service at SMRC and for her more than 40 years of state service. Dee received her Bachelor's degree in Business Education from Alcorn State University. She transferred to SMRC in July 1982 from Gulfport's Mississippi Learning Resource Center. Dee has served in various capacities and in several departments as the Center has expanded and services have changed. She started out in the Diagnostic & Evaluation/ Psychology Department as a Clerk-Typist Senior and is currently the Administrative Assistant for the Community Services Division.

Known as the "go to person" whenever anyone needs assistance, Dee exemplifies SMRC's Core Values of respect, responsibility, communication, cooperative effort, commitment, and continuous learning. She anticipates the needs of others and makes sure that her duties are done with accuracy and efficiency. Dee is known throughout the Center as honest, trustworthy, respectful, and dedicated. As an acknowledgment of her exemplary performance, she has been presented with the Employee of the Quarter award and Employee of the Year award in years past.

In addition to watching SMRC evolve and change over the years, Dee raised two daughters and she and her husband of 44 years, Michael, are now blessed with seven grandchildren. Dee is considered an asset to everyone at SMRC and we are honored to have her touch our lives.

The Legend of Christmas Coyote

Glenda McMillon, Client Services Director

This year, clients from SMRC campus and community sites performed a beautiful play for our annual Christmas program. The play was based on the book, "The Legend of Christmas Coyote," written by one of SMRC's very own, James "Jimmy" Tucker, Jr. Jimmy began his tenure with SMRC on June 1, 2008.

Jimmy, known to his grandchildren as "Geezer," moved to Taos, New Mexico in 1993. During his first Christmas in Taos he came across the Rainbow Christmas Coyote in the local Mercado and took him home to become a fixture in the Tucker family. The coyote is a recurring character in Native American lore, best known as a "trickster." During the Christmas season of 2013, Jimmy noticed that the Rainbow Christmas Coyote seemed to be watching over a photo of his grandson sitting on the table. "The Legend of Christmas Coyote" popped into mind and Jimmy wrote the entire story in an hour.

According to Geezer, "It is a tale of redemption, the heart of service and new life in Christ." This story is dedicated to Jimmy's grandchildren and all other little children. Jimmy will retire from his service as Audio-Visual Coordinator for SMRC in May of 2019.

South Mississippi Regional Center
1170 West Railroad Street
Long Beach, MS 39560-4199

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 7
Long Beach MS



Celebrating Our Success

2018 Annual Employee Recognition

South Mississippi Regional Center honored tenured staff and individuals who retired at the Annual Employee Recognition Ceremony for their commitment to service. Staff were presented with service pins for their length of service to SMRC and retirees were commended for their years of service and dedication.

35 years

Deneece Saucier

25 years

Marsha Brock

Curtis Rester

Kaye Rester

20 years

Rolita Barnes

Monica Corley

Anitra Ozene

Raymon Scott

Patricia Tatum

15 years

Hermia Buckley

Stephanie Hines

Jill Ray

10 years

Tammy Brown

Tracy Brown

Rhonda Carroll

Theresa Coates

Elizabeth Cuevas

Maria Socorro Llanda

Kyla Nannery

James Tucker

5 years

Kala Burgess

Marketia Chavis

Johnny Hinton

Jessica Lambert

Darryl Morris

Nakita Rankin

Christine Wheeler

Retirees

Carol Beard

Nancy Bennett

Cynthia Dupree

Christine Fields

Jan Gadow

John Robertson

Lori Taylor

Dynita White